

ABSTRACT

Black Souls Rising: The Rastafari in Jamaica

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The Rastafari movement originates in Jamaica at the beginning of the 20th century. It is a religio-political movement that addresses issues of social injustice and the nefarious hegemony of financial institutions. Its members resist the current social order by expressing their discontent in theological terms nuanced with a millenarian orientation. Inspired by Marcus Garvey's message, the Rastafari envision an imminent time of redemption during which white civilization or "Babylon" would meet its own demise, and that Blacks would be delivered from white oppression. Garvey predicted in the 1920s that an African king would soon rise and that it would serve as a sign of their liberation. The Rastafari saw Haile Selassie's coronation in 1930 as the emperor of Ethiopia as the fulfillment of Garvey's prophecy and they bestowed on him divine powers, believing that he would work out the details with the governments of the world to bring about their emancipation and eventual expatriation to Africa. This presentation consists of a brief description of the historical roots of the Rastafari movement beginning with the teachings of the evangelical black preachers during slavery in the late 18th century, and later the emergence of the charismatic movements during the period of the Great Revival in Jamaica (1860-1920). It also describes the movement's current theology and rituals, the emergence of different sects and their related communities, the role of women, the devotees' contributions to the arts, and their profound concerns for economic and racial injustice.